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# *Azaleas and Rhododendrons*

**at the National Arboretum**



**NATIONAL ARBORETUM  
LEAFLET NO. 1**

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Washington 25, D.C.**



## **AZALEAS AND RHODODENDRONS AT THE NATIONAL ARBORETUM**

One of the most colorful spring-flowering groups at the National Arboretum is the collection of azaleas and rhododendrons.

A relatively complete set of species and horticultural varieties hardy in this climate is being assembled at the Arboretum in furtherance of its scientific and educational objectives. Standard reference collections will be maintained for comparative study and evaluation. Species and selected breeding strains are available for research purposes, including the production of improved races for cultivation in less climatically favored sections of the country.

### **BOTANICAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Azaleas and rhododendrons are members of the heath family (Ericaceae) and are closely



related to the blueberries, cranberries, trailing-arbutus, and mountain-laurel.

The original, or Linnean, classification (in 1753) of these plants was based largely upon American species. It seemed logical at that time to place the deciduous (leaf-shedding) kinds in one genus, *Azalea*, and the evergreen kinds in another genus, *Rhododendron*. But, with the subsequent influx of species from the Orient (about 700 species have since been described), it was found that no simple and constant characters remained as a basis for separation; some of the "azaleas" were evergreen and some of the "rhododendrons" were deciduous. Consequently, during the present century, most botanical authors have assigned all species of azaleas to the genus *Rhododendron*.

Even though azaleas are botanically rhododendrons, most gardeners and nurserymen will continue to refer to the name "*Azalea*" for the thin-leaved, semievergreen or deciduous types, and to "*Rhododendron*" for the large leathery-leaved and fully evergreen kinds.



## KINDS OF AZALEAS

Azaleas of the garden may be roughly classified into five principal groups:

- The relatively compact growing, semievergreen kinds principally derived from the Japanese *Rhododendron obtusum*, with white, pink, or red flowers. This group includes the Kurume, Glenn Dale, and Kaempferi hybrids.
- The later and larger flowered orange-red deciduous azaleas derived from *Rhododendron molle* of China, *R. japonicum* of Japan, *R. luteum* from the Caucasus, and some American species to form the Ghent and Mollis hybrids.
- The group of about 16 native azalea species with their infinite minor variations which form a class of hardy, smaller flowered deciduous plants in the white to pink and orange-red color range. These are the wild "bush honeysuckles" and "flame azaleas" of the Eastern States from New England to Florida and Texas.
- The large-flowered "Indian" azaleas, which provide a major color display in the gardens of Charleston, S.C., and the gulf coast. These are not reliably hardy at the National Arboretum.
- Additional species from China and Japan of primary interest to the collector or botanist, but including *R. schlippenbachii*, *R. yedoense*, and a few others of frequent garden cultivation.

## THE ARBORETUM COLLECTION

*Azaleas*.—The visitor to the Arboretum during the April-May flowering season will be impressed by the floral abundance of two main plantings of azaleas—the Glenn Dale hybrids of group 1, above, and the Ghent and Mollis hybrids of group 2.

The Glenn Dale hybrids, in the class of white to red-pink flowered, are semievergreen "Japanese" azaleas. They cover the slopes of Mount Hamilton generally above the roadway. They are also exhibited as a named collection in the brick-walled Morrison Garden at the approach to the general display.

The Ghent and Mollis hybrids are later flowering, deciduous azaleas, often in the color range of yellow to orange-red. They are found below the roadway in many scattered plantings. These

hybrids are also assembled as a named collection in a central part of Azalea Valley.

Many other kinds of azaleas, including the Kurume and Kaempferi hybrids and the native azalea species, are represented in the Arboretum collection in smaller quantity. The Glenn Dale and the Ghent and Mollis hybrids, however, will remain the most conspicuous plantings for some years.

*Rhododendrons*.—Assemblage of the evergreen or "true" rhododendrons has only just begun. There are a few large specimens of *R. catawbiense* hybrids, but the main collection of large-flowered garden hybrids is to be seen as very young plants, which have been set out since 1953. These plantings are in the lower regions of Azalea Valley toward Horseshoe Pond, along Rhododendron Valley Road, and in a new area north of the Morrison Garden.

## LOCATION OF MAJOR GROUPS

The more important Arboretum plantings of azaleas and rhododendrons may be located by directional signs on the principal foot trails.

### Glenn Dale Hybrids

This new race of large-flowered "Japanese" hybrid azaleas was bred at the Glenn Dale Station of the United States Department of Agriculture by B. Y. Morrison. That they are well adapted for planting in this area is demonstrated by the 65,000 representatives which provide the main display above the long curve of Azalea Road. Young plants of 457 selections, which were named by Morrison and released by the Department, are assembled for comparative study in the Morrison Garden.

### Kurume and Kaempferi Hybrids

A number of the newer Kurume and Kaempferi hybrid azaleas, including the closely related Gable hybrids, are planted along the upper levels of Mount Hamilton walk, which starts at the Morrison Garden. However, a much larger collection of several hundred varieties of the standard Kurume, Glenn Dale, Gable, Chisholm-Merritt, Pericat, Yerkes, Morrison, and Shammarello hybrids has been recently established along a grass walk north of the Morrison Garden. Several of the larger and late-flowered Satsuki (Chugai) hybrids, in which *R. indicum* has been combined with *R. obtusum* of the Kurumes, occupy beds within the south entrance of Morrison Garden.

### Ghent Hybrids

Many of these are immediately across the road from Morrison Garden. A full, named set of 3 plants each of more than 60 varieties is in the lower center of Azalea Valley.

### Mollis Hybrids

Mass plantings are assembled on either side of the main ravine below the brick overlook. A named collection of 100 varieties is grouped with the named Ghents in the lower center of Azalea Valley.

This excellent collection of Ghent and Mollis hybrids was donated by the people of the Netherlands.

### Knaphill Hybrids

These large-flowered deciduous azaleas, which include the Exbury hybrids, are of recent introduction from England where the Exbury hybrids were bred at the Exbury estate of the late Lionel de Rothschild. The collection of 120 varieties, which bloom in May after the Mollis azaleas, is assembled in the lower center of Azalea Valley near the Mollis azaleas. The Knaphill hybrids seem to be very hardy and exhibit a wide color range that includes white, yellow, pink, orange, and red.

### Native Azalea Species

A grouping of young plants of about 16 American species with their variants and hybrids is located in the small valley running down to the south arm of Horseshoe Pond. Assemblage of this sizable collection represents a partial product of research work with the native species during recent years.

### Exotic Species

A number of exotic species, chiefly from China and Japan and including *R. luteum*, *mariesii*, *ovatum*, *reticulatum*, and *schlippenbachii*, are located across the road from Morrison Garden—just below the first grouping of Ghent hybrids.

### Rhododendrons

A number of Catawba hybrids are planted near the upper end of Azalea Valley, while some of the hardy *R. smirnowi-catawbiense* hybrids, raised in Germany by T. J. H. Seidel, are lower down on the right side. The main collection of 150 varieties of standard and newer hybrids, a recent gift of the Capitol Committee of the Garden Club of America, is grouped in the vicinity of the footbridges in lower Azalea Valley, but many of these plants are not yet of flowering size.



Young plants of 34 varieties of the Shammarello *R. fortunei-smirnowi-catawbiense* hybrids are on a north slope of Mount Hamilton; sizable specimens of *R. fortunei* decorate the approach to the dogwood planting in the northeast part of the Arboretum.

## CULTURAL SUGGESTIONS

With careful hardiness selection both azaleas and rhododendrons are well adapted to cultivation in the gardens of large areas of our country provided that their few demands are satisfied. They need an acid soil which is fairly well drained; they like abundant peat moss, leaf mold, or other suitable organic matter incorporated in this soil; and they are greatly benefited by a year-round mulch or soil top-dressing of leaves, peat moss, or sawdust.

An ideal position, especially for rhododendrons, is the partial shade of structures or high-branched trees, although many of the hardier azaleas succeed in full sunlight.

Given an occasional spring feeding with sulfate of ammonia, cottonseed meal, or a prepared acid-soil fertilizer for established specimens and water as it is needed during very dry weather, both azaleas and rhododendrons will provide a maximum color display in return for a minimum of further attention.



Issued April 1954; slightly revised March 1960.